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ABSTRACT

Forty fourth grade children participated in an investigation of the extent to which ratings of a peer would be differentially affected by categorical labels and assigned attributes. After viewing a videotape, Ss were assigned to one of four treatment groups (label and attribute conditions). Results from a scale requesting opinions about the child on the videotape indicated that positive attributes (humor, sports ability) produced favorable peer ratings when compared to neutral ones. No effects were observed relative to differential ratings of a child as a function of a special education label assigned to him. (Author/CL)

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Research Report No. 16

WHAT CAN I SAY AFTER I SAY LD?

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I. Adequacy of Norm-Referenced Data for Prediction of Success

II. Computer Simulation Research on the Assessment/Decision-making/Intervention Process

III. Comparative Research on Children Labeled LD and Children Failing Academically but not Labeled LD

IV. Surveys on In-the-Field Assessment, Decision Making, and Intervention

V. Ethological Research on Placement Team Decision Making

VI. Bias Following Assessment

VII. Reliability and Validity of Formative Evaluation Procedures

VIII. Data-Utilization Systems in Instructional Programming

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Abstract

A variety of factors have been shown to be influential in teacher-student relationships; both labels and behaviors have been investigated with regard to their biasing effects within special education. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent to which fourth grade children's ratings of a peer would be differentially affected by categorical labels and assigned attributes. An analysis of the results suggested that positive attributes produced favorable peer ratings when compared to neutral ones. The results are discussed with regard to implications for altering the differential effects often observed in teacher-pupil relationships.

What Can I Say After I Say LD?

The assessment of children takes many forms and purposes; that is, diagnostic evaluations are useful for screening and identification as well as for planning and evaluating interventions. It has long been recognized that the labeling process may be subject to considerable bias (Bryan & Bryan, 1975; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, in press). It is this aspect of assessment that was investigated in this research.

It has been shown that bias occurs before, during, and after educational assessments. A variety of factors have been shown to be influential in biasing judgments of children, even before a test response item has been uttered (Algozzine, 1976; Brophy & Good, 1974; Coates, 1972; Lenkowsky & Blackman, 1968; Meyer & Thompson, 1956; Palardy, 1969; Rubovits & Maehr, 1973; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, in press). Similarly, the circumstances of the testing, the influence of the examiner on the test results, and observer bias have been studied as factors influential during the actual evaluation (Hersch, 1971; Hersen & Bellack, 1976; Masling, 1957; Neisworth, Kurth, Jones, & Madle, 1974; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, in press). And, considerable evidence exists to support the conclusion that bias occurs after the evaluation is complete and the LD label has been assigned (Algozzine, Mercer, & Countermine, 1977; Algozzine & Sutherland, 1977; Foster & Ysseldyke, 1976; Jacobs, 1978; Sutherland & Algozzine, 1979; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, in press).

Labels seem to generate differential expectations and performances within interpersonal interactions. The actual classroom behaviors of LD children have been shown to be different than those of their normal

peers (Bryan & Bryan, 1975). Bryan and Wheeler (1972) found that LD children spent more time than their peers in non-task oriented behaviors and less time in task-oriented ones; similar results have been reported (Bryan, 1974a). Additionally, LD children are "likely to be rejected or in conflict with parent, teacher and peers alike" (Bryan & Bryan, 1975, p. 121). Considerable evidence exists indicating that they experience peer rejection (Bryan, 1974b, 1976, 1977; Bryan, Wheeler, Felcan, & Henek, 1976).

Whether LD children are rejected because of what they are called or because of what they do remains to be answered. Regardless, professionals who deal with identification, placement, and programming face a problem related to the integration of LD children. It is likely that they will be rejected by parents, teachers, and other children (either because of what they are called or because of what they do); a method of alleviating this rejection was the topic of this research. Specifically, the research investigated the extent to which children's ratings of a peer were influenced by labels and attributes.

Method

Subjects

Forty fourth grade children were selected as participants in this study; 70 percent (i.e., 28) of the children were white and approximately half (53%) were girls. The children were randomly assigned to groups in which label and attribute variations were present during the experimental procedure. The race and sex distributions were similar for each treatment group (all $\chi 2$ analyses were nonsignificant). The participants

were considered to be a representative sample of the fourth grade children in the suburban school from which they were drawn.

Procedure

Each child was invited to view a videotape of a male child "who might move to Florida from Pennsylvania." The tape had been used in other research; one of the child's responses was correct for someone living in Pennsylvania and was established as correct by this introduction. During the presentation, "Tiger" engaged in several different activities. He was shown participating in several brief assessment segments, and then engaging in free-play activities.

Results of a pilot study with a similar group of fourth graders suggested that children viewed the videotape differently during the testing portion than during the non-task oriented segment, giving a more negative rating ($\bar{X}$ = 4.0) to the free-play activities than to the testing activities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.1). Similar more negative ratings of the second activities were also given by teachers in another pilot investigation.

Each child was assigned to one of four treatment groups. Some of the children were told the child in the tape was learning disabled; others were told he was normal. Two attribute conditions were also identified. In the positive condition, it was suggested that the child had special abilities in addition to those characteristics observed. For example, it was suggested that in addition to being [label], the child told very funny stories and had been known to make all the other children in his class laugh. He was also portrayed as being good in sports (e.g., "whichever team he is on always seems to win"). Some evidence exists to suggest that adults who make others laugh are viewed positively (Damico

& Purkey, 1978) and it was assumed that these attributes would be viewed favorably by fourth grade children. In the neutral condition, the child was portrayed as similar to other children in his class. It was suggested that he sometimes finished his work and did what the teacher told him but that at other times he did otherwise.

To evaluate the effects of labels and attribute assignments, a two phase experimental procedure was utilized. Before viewing the tape, the children were told they were "about to see a tape of a [label] 4th grade boy from Pennsylvania," and that they would have to make decisions about him if he moved to their state. They were told that they would be asked some questions about how they felt about the boy after seeing some of the tape. After viewing the testing segment, the children completed a set of questions regarding their acceptance of the child. The children were then told that it would be difficult to show everything about someone in a short videotape so they were going to be told some other information before seeing the next portion of tape. A short paragraph, in which the attribute assignments were conveyed, was then read to the children. After seeing the non-task oriented portion of the tape, a second set of peer acceptance questions was administered.

Dependent Measure

A 13-item scale was composed for use in this research; it requested opinions about the child in the videotape. For example, items dealing with how well liked the child might be or whether the responding child's teacher, and/or friends, or the responding child would want the taped child in his/her class were included. All responses were recorded by having the children make one of five facial diagrams reflective of

degrees of positive (smiling) or negative (frowning) feelings. Numerical values from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive) were assigned after the children had completed the entire procedure. A brief training activity was used to familiarize the children with the criterion measure's response format. The Spearman-Brown corrected reliability estimates (i.e., coefficient alpha) for subjects' responses before and after attribute assignment were .54 and .92 respectively.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed as a three-factor mixed analysis of variance design; the label and attribute (positive or neutral) conditions were considered between subjects' factors and the nature of the attribute assignment (i.e., present or absent) was viewed as the within subjects' factor. Responses to the dependent scale were separated into two groups; those pertaining to peer acceptance were represented as one score and those pertaining to social acceptance represented another. The results of these two analyses were then further considered.

Results

Means and standard deviations for the peer acceptance ratings of the labeled child prior to and after the assignment of the attributes are presented in Table 1; the analysis of variance summary table appears in Table 2. A significant attribute by occasion interaction is indicated, as are attribute and occasion main effects.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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Since the main effects were involved in the higher-order interaction, follow-up analyses were completed for the simple effects. Because

the assumptions of homogeneous variances and covariances were violated, posthoc t tests were performed with individual variance and covariance estimates as error terms. An analysis of these results indicated that the fourth graders' peer acceptance ratings were similar prior to receiving any attribute information and after receiving the "positive" information; their ratings were significantly lower after viewing the non-task oriented segment and receiving neutral attribute information. A graphic representation of this interaction is shown in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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The outcomes of the analysis of the social acceptance ratings were similar to those of the peer acceptance analyses. The attribute by occasion interaction was significant ($F = 43.57$, $p < .05$), as were the attribute and occasion main effects. Follow-up analyses indicated that ratings were significantly lower after receiving neutral information ($\bar{X} = 2.5$) than in any other condition.

Discussion

Teachers, school psychologists, and other school personnel engage in decision making about children. One aspect of this process is the assignment of categorical labels and presentation of related descriptions regarding a child. To some extent, bias has been shown to be influential in educational decision making with learning disabled children (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, in press). The intent of this research was to investigate a means by which some of the negative aspects of this process could be altered.

No effects were observed relative to differential ratings of a child as a function of a special education label assigned to him. This result is similar to that obtained by others (Aloia, 1975; Budoff & Sipperstein, 1978; Gottlieb, 1974); children and adults tend not to respond to labels when more salient features (e.g., behavior) are present.

Differences in ratings were indicated relative to non-task oriented behaviors. When the videotaped child engaged in sedentary, task-oriented behavior, he was viewed more positively than when he engaged in non-task oriented behaviors; however, these negative ratings were present only when the child had not been assigned positive attributes in addition to those present and observable.

The classroom behavior of children in special classes has been shown to be different from that of children in regular classes (Bryan & Bryan, 1975; Gampel, Gottlieb, & Harrison, 1974). The peer acceptance of special children has been shown to be affected (Bryan & Bryan, 1975; Goodman, Gottlieb, & Harrison, 1972); however, no differences have been indicated in children's responsiveness to categorical labels. It would seem that children respond negatively (or positively) to their peers not because of what they are called within the adult community but as a result of what they do in the child community. Children have been shown to respond negatively to incompetence as well as to non-task oriented behavior in peers; however, it seems that these negative reactions may be counter-balanced by the assignment of positive qualities to the target child.

Expanded efforts toward the integration of regular and special children have become a reality. The results obtained in this study offer one alternative through which that integration may be facilitated. In explaining the entrance or attendance of a learning disabled student in a regular classroom, it would seem that teachers, school psychologists, and other personnel responsible for such decisions should consider the way in which they represent the integrated child to peers. Explanations which emphasize or identify positive qualities would seem to be more beneficial than failing to mention them or letting the child "make his own way."

To some extent, it may be unproductive to try to replace an already existing attitude about a child that is a result of the label assigned to him or the behavior he exhibits (Brophy & Good, 1974; MacMillan, Jones, & Aloia, 1974); however, it may be possible to alter or embellish that attitude by assigning attributes as was done in this study. While no test was made of the extent to which teachers' attitudes can be changed through this procedure, it seems to have some merit and warrants further research with that group of professionals.

There is no reason to believe that teachers will view a "child who tells funny stories and makes the whole class laugh" in a positive light. It is interesting to speculate on their responses to a child depicted different from all his classmates in that he always does what the teacher says and seldom exhibits behaviors which require correction from the teacher. The critical factor in selecting attributes seems to be that they are believable relative to the individuals involved. For example, telling a teacher that the hyperactive child s/he has been working with

for eight months is actually quite calm would hardly meet this criteria; however, many other possibilities exist.

It has been shown that labels and behavior of children can have an influence on others' interactions with them. It seems, now, that the task of researchers and others is to find ways of alleviating some of those negative effects. The research reported here was a relatively successful attempt to maintain positive responses from children through the assignment of favorable attributes to a child. Continued efforts in this direction are warranted and encouraged.

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Footnotes

Bob Algozzine and James E. Ysseldyke are affiliated with the University of Minnesota Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Peer Acceptance Ratings of Labeled Child Prior to and After Attribute Assignment[a]

Attribute	Label	Occasion	
		Before	After
Neutral	Normal	$\bar{X}$ = 3.57 SD = 0.77	$\bar{X}$ = 2.45 SD = 0.96
	LD	$\bar{X}$ = 3.87 SD = 0.72	$\bar{X}$ = 3.30 SD = 1.70
Positive	Normal	$\bar{X}$ = 4.07 SD = 0.38	$\bar{X}$ = 4.15 SD = 0.75
	LD	$\bar{X}$ = 3.70 SD = 0.71	$\bar{X}$ = 4.00 SD = 0.78

[a] Ratings were on a scale from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive).

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Peer Acceptance Ratings

Source	MS	DF	F
Between Subjects			
Attributes	9.339	1	7.394*
Labels	0.501	1	0.397
Attributes X Labels	3.472	1	2.749
Error	1.263	36	
Within Subjects			
Occasions	2.113	1	4.972*
Attributes X Occasions	5.339	1	12.562*
Labels X Occasions	0.735	1	1.729
Attributes X Occasions X Labels	0.139	1	0.327
Error	0.425	36	

* $p < .05$

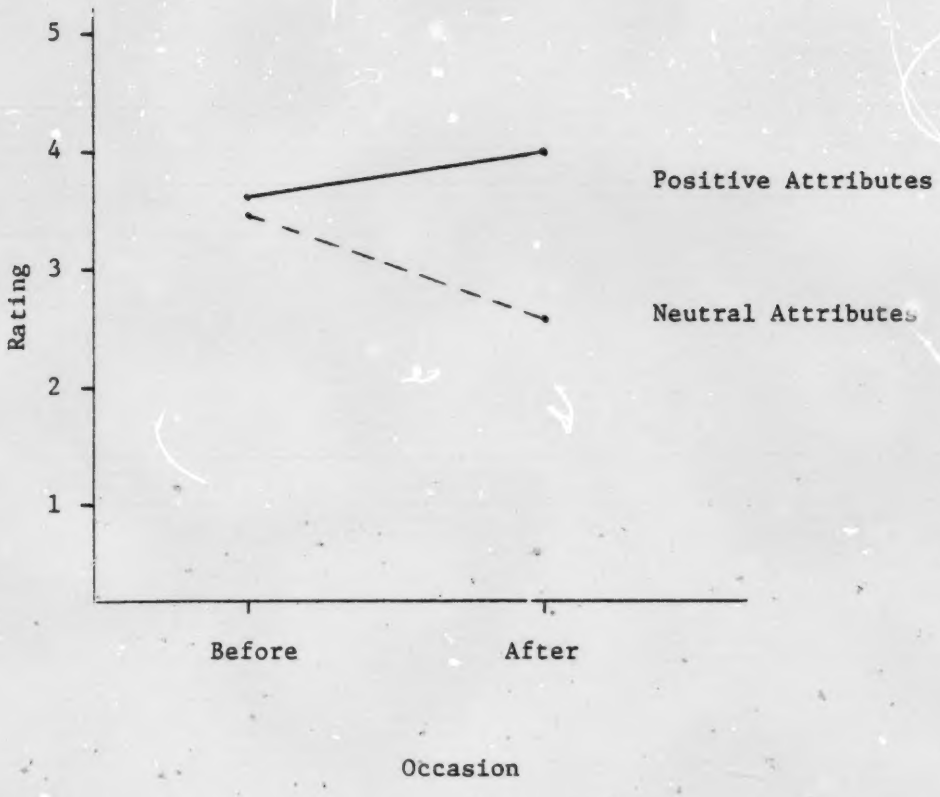

Figure 1. Graphic representation of attribute by occasion interaction.

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